CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

This study is based on the Cameron’s perspective in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to young learners. She found that learning foreign languages, such as English has been compulsory for a long time, especially in this era where the use of technology and internet has spread out around the world, and it is needed for education and learning system. According to the experts, learning language should have been started from younger ages; that is from 5 to 12 years old as children learn language much easier than older learners (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

Cameron (2005) suggested the idea that children have their own unique characteristics in learning language, which sets them apart from older learners. In Asian countries, such Indonesia has applied English as important subject in high schools. However, it is still considered as one of the countries that is lacking in English skills. So what is the problem with English education and learning methods in Indonesia?

In Indonesia, many curriculums have been made and teachers have applied different types of learning approaches, e.g., behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. The new curriculum, K2013 is the most likely approach to use learner-centred, that is when the teacher plays the role of a facilitator of the learning process and an organizer of the learning situation. Cooper (2010) supported this theory that a teacher, for implementation of the learner-centred approaches, must understand the learner and their learning styles. It is essential to know in details the characteristics of each and every learner in our classroom. This approach focuses more about how students to have more control over learning and teachers act as their assistants in order to achieve the learning goal.

However, Cameron (2001) clearly stated that based on her own study, to apply the learner-centred approach is not enough, and she proposed a new ‘learning-centred’ approach. This theory enforces the idea that learning is not about who has the most control between students and teachers in the classroom, but it is their task to evaluate
the learning together. In other word, learning a language should become an out-put and out-come oriented process.

Weimer (2002) also supported this theory by saying that learning-centred education helps students acquire competency in skill areas and creates lifelong learners. This theory picked the researcher’s interest because she can relate this with her own experience. A personal example from the researcher is when she assisted a Filipino student in doing her teacher training in Kindergarten Jambi City, Indonesia 2018. On her first week of observation, the subject taught was not authentic as many students did not seem familiar with the topics, and the games and activities were considered uninteresting as students tended to unwilling to do and finish their works. Most of the time, they did not focus on listening, and their physical movements were limited. However, when the Filipino teacher started to teach English, students showed so much interest in learning, and they were so motivated in practicing and improving their knowledge, even after the school ended. This life skill, that is to realise the ‘love of learning’ is what makes learning is different and special. To make students love learning, the learning activities have to be engaging and contextual, which this supports the importance of learning-centred approach.

Cameron’s perspectives in teaching English enforce the idea of ‘learning-centred approach’. Learning and teaching are different, and teachers of young learners should understand this difference; understanding their inner mental or characteristics in learning. She stated many teachers often misunderstand the idea that young learners (YL) learning is simple, straight-forward, thus they need only to understand simple language. Cameron disagrees with this idea that YL are not simple learners, they are just different from how adults learn. Children have their own understanding in connecting their knowledge to the world, which they need teachers’ assistance to make that happen. Also, they can be interested in both simple and complicated topics, which is why learning-centred approach explains this.

The researcher’s point of view is that how this theory regarding the learning activities applied in Jambi elementary schools. The researcher would like to seek understanding about learning activities children do in the classroom and how they help children learn English productively.
1.2 Research Question

Based on the description of the background above, this study investigates the following questions:

1) What learning activities are mostly undertaken by children in learning English in primary schools?
2) How do those activities facilitate productive learning for young students?

1.3 Objective of the Research

Based on the problems stated above, the purpose of the study is to compile learning activities conducted by students in classrooms. Those activities are analysed in terms of their appropriateness to facilitate students in learning English productively. Finally, the researcher discusses how those learning activities can be improved to help students learn more productively.

1.4 Limitation of the Research

This study only focuses on exploring EFL classroom activities in improving elementary students’ learning skills to be productive learners in Jambi City. Also, the researcher only chose two elementary schools in Jambi to do the investigation; they are School 1 (a private school), School 2 (a public school), and these schools are located in Jambi City. For each school, the researcher might need a week to complete the observation and interview. The study uses qualitative data collection method only such as full observation of video recording and some interviews with teachers and students if necessary.

1.5 Significant of the Research

This study provides some information about the contextual EFL classroom activities for children in Jambi, and how they can be improved for learning EFL with children productively. Hopefully, this research can be useful for the lecturers, teachers, students, and next researcher who are conducting related topic with different limitations.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

*Productive Learning* – learning activity that results in: 1) higher academic performance, including language skills like listening, reading, speaking, and writing,
and learning soft skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem solving, teamwork, ethics, leadership, and lifelong learning skills; 2) improvement of students’ intrinsic motivation (Ansyari, 2014)

*Elementary Students* – The first years of compulsory schooling are called elementary or primary school. Usually a child must be enrolled in kindergarten or first grade in the calendar year in which he turns six. Elementary school, which is almost always co-educational (mixed boys and girls), is usually attended from the age of 5 or 6 until 12.